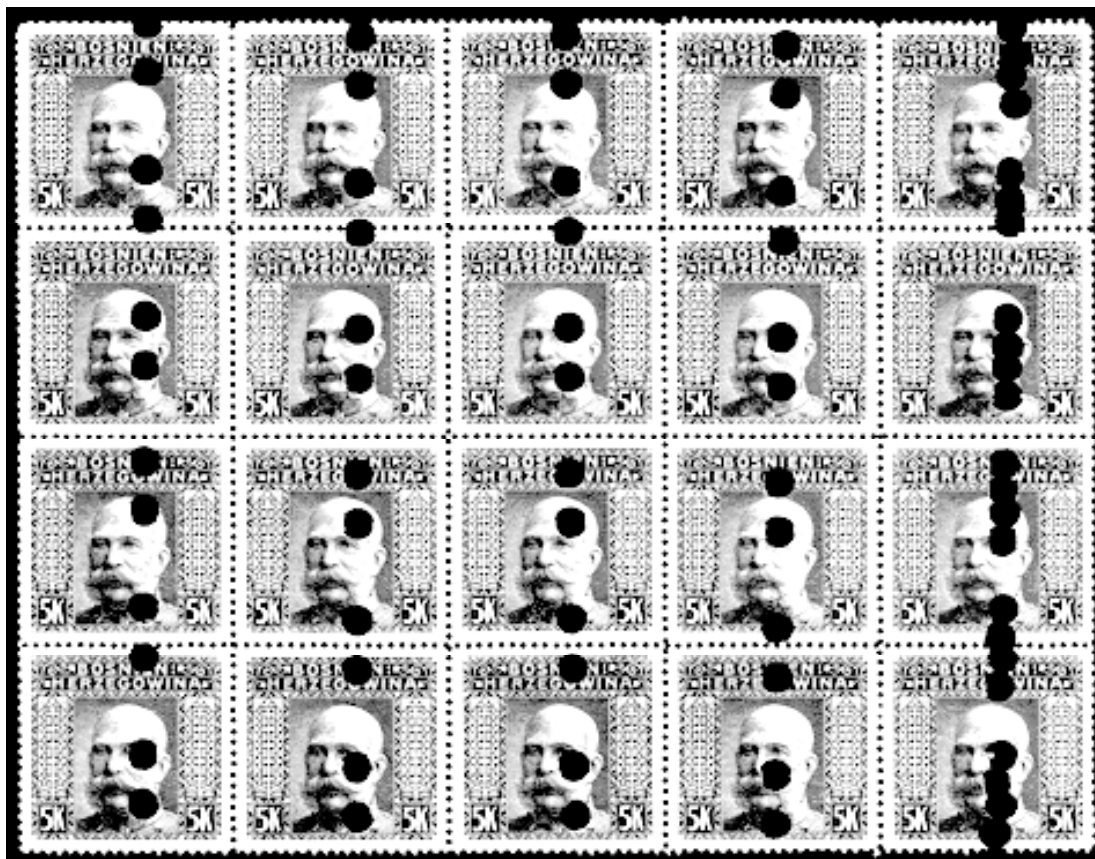

Bosnia's Punched Hole Mystery

Hal Hite, Chairman, Bosnia Study Group

Editor's note: The following article was brought to my attention by John A. Cummings (#2509). It first appeared in *The Trumpeter* 33(2): 1-5. It is reprinted here with the gracious permission of (and electronic copy from) Hal Hite. *The Trumpeter* is published,

quarterly, by the Croatian Philatelic Society (<www.croatianstamps.com>). Thanks to both John and Hal for this information on these holey mysteries from Bosnia & Herzegovina.



Block of 20 with double punch error in the right column plus faint orange crayon vertical lines across the holes.

The "Demonitized" 1906 Pictorial Issue

Background

On November 1, 1906, the stamps of Bosnia-Herzegovina underwent a complete change in design. The stamp size was increased from the small format stamp used since 1879, the name of the country was added, the stamps depicted scenes of local interest, and they were engraved rather than

typographed. All in all the clear scenic images, large size and brilliant colors represented quite an innovative step for such a small country. The Pictorial Issue was in use for 6 years and was withdrawn from service on December 3, 1912. After the war, in 1919, four values of the issue were overprinted and re-issued for use by the newly formed country of Yugoslavia.

At some point in time, the stamps of this 1906 issue, including the imperforate varieties, were apparently cancelled by punching a series of holes into all

remaining sheets. Each hole is approximately 4.5 mm. in diameter. The holes are spaced approximately 7.5 mm. or 14.5 mm. apart and are oriented in either the horizontal or vertical direction. Some of these punch-cancelled stamps were additionally cancelled with an X and/or a line via a blue or orange crayon.

The Bosnia Study Group is attempting to determine the who, what, when, where, and why of this mystery cancellation.

What we know so far is outlined below and we have posted our "best guess" conclusion, based on what we know.

All interested collectors are encouraged to send any relevant information or references that they may have regarding this investigation to the email address above.

What we know so far

1. These punched holes are widely present in the 1906 issue. It is rare for other Bosnia or Austria stamps to be so cancelled. The punched holes exist for all values of the issue.
2. The punch-cancelled stamps have gum and exist both perforate and imperforate.
3. There are no postally used examples of the punched stamps, either on cover or off cover. There are CTO examples.
4. The stamps were punched in sheets. They were not punched individually. This is proved by the existence of large multiples such as the image above and by the existence of full punched sheets.
5. Punch-cancelled stamps exist with the special perforations of the 1906 issue.
6. Some stamps are cancelled with a horizontal orientation of the punched holes and some are cancelled with a vertical orientation of the punched holes. Both types exist.
7. There are also crayon cancels on many of the punched stamps, either blue or orange depending on the stamp color, in a wide variety of line and x

markings. The crayon cancels were applied prior to the punching of the holes.

8. In 1911, the remaining stock of the 1906 issue was shipped from Vienna to Sarajevo in order to be used up there.

9. Un-punched remainders of the 1906 issue were overprinted for subsequent postal use, after they were withdrawn from service on December 3, 1912. There are no punched cancels for these overprinted issues.

The 5h and 10h were overprinted and issued November 1, 1914 (1st war charity issue).

The 5h and 10h were also overprinted and issued July 10, 1915 (2nd war charity issue).

Note: Supplies of the 5h and 10h values may have become exhausted after the 1915 overprinting since all subsequently overprinted charity issues were on other types of stamps.

The 20h, 40h, 1K and 2k were overprinted and issued in 1919 for use in Yugoslavia.

10. Similar crayon cancels exist on Austrian issues.

The following hypotheses have been suggested (attribution in parens)

- Demonetization. (E.C. Coleman) " For some reason in the final years of Bosnia's existence, stamps of the 1906 issue were demonetized. In order to make them invalid for postal service, a series of holes, either horizontal or on a vertical plane, approximately 3/16 of an inch in diameter, two or three holes per stamp were punched in all sheets remaining in the central dispersing office. It would have seemed more practical to have burned the remaining supplies but probably due to collector demand, demonetization by this method seemed expedient."
- Telegraph Usage. (Leon ? a stamp dealer) "To pay for telegraph messages, people used regular stamps with punch cancellations. I don't have any additional information, but it is very interesting that they used imperfs for these purposes."

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- Perfins. (Eck Spahich) "Those stamps are perfins, sold to various firms for in-house use."
 - Pre-cancels.
 - Printers Waste.
 - Archival Punched. (Charlie Hass - Hass Stamps) "The punch holes are characteristic of the work of security printers, who often apply security punches, in lieu of SPECIMEN overprints or punctures to their archival sheets. This was a measure to prevent them from being illicitly sold and used for postage".
 - Political Protest. (Globus Stamp Co.) An old approval sheet discovered by R. Miller contained four punched stamps and the following printed info. "After the war was over and Bosnia became part of Yugoslavia, the Bosnians revenged themselves upon their former Austrian rulers by destroying everything left by them. These stamps were purposefully defaced by having holes punched through them and then were sold to remind the world of the intensity of Bosnia's hatred and contempt for everything Austrian."
 - Reminders.
 - Souvenirs. (J.Prins) In a note in the 1975 Perfins Bulletin, Mr. Prins writes that supplies of the 1906 issue, found in Sarajevo in 1918, were defaced with punches and distributed to officials of the new Yugoslav government as souvenirs.

Our "Best Guess" Scenario

Although no one has presented documented proof of

the origin of these stamps, we have formulated a reasonable guess as follows.

Sometime around the end of 1912, the printing office in Vienna decided to clear out its remainders of the 1906 Pictorial Issue. The issue was no longer in demand; the supplementary issues of 1912 were complete; and the 1912 First Franz Joseph Issue was in service. All stock necessary for postal use in Bosnia had been transferred to Sarajevo in 1911 and there was no foreseeable need for the remaining adhesives.

Since the philatelic market was in full swing, (the 1911 reprinting of the early Bosnia issues had been a great success) it was decided to sell (or in some cases give) the remaining stock to dealers, collectors and other privileged individuals. There was a wide variety of material to deal with; including crayon cancelled waste sheets, specially perforated sheets, imperforate sheets and normal sheet remainders. All values were represented in one manner or another.

In order to avoid major confusion about such a vast quantity and variety of material entering the market at high discounts from face value and since most of the material was destined for the packet trade, it was decided to deface the stamps by punching holes in all of the sheets. Accordingly, the sheets were punched by a security or archival punch, in either a horizontal or vertical orientation. The finished material was sold in bulk.